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Bard

RENAISSANCE

But these poems to write now, this news
this morning, these also
are fragments of Renaissance
old broken treatises
scratched on slate and vellum, scraps
around the corner from the Mirandolas

I am a fragment of that time
a coarse new-lettered Hellenist on fire
with who knows what green flame
lit from God knows where

because fire is what leaps up *always*
out from and against the torpor of the usual
the stalled academy of the secure

2

or this text in water

a salmon to leap, strife
against the current of this easy time
this timid mindset built of yesterday

my broken word
will save the world
because it is impossible
to understand

3

we have to burn the horizon

aporia, Arabia,

I stood once on the Persian Gulf
watching the refineries of the emirates
burn smoke into dawn

tender blushing smog
death cult of our prosperous machine

something must be done
and all I give you are fragments

scraps from lost manuscripts
miraculously reborn

cloth from her lost loom
this pen nib licked by Pico's tongue

because the work we make
now is always past, part
of the lost body of the lord,
Osiris, beloved, husband,
wife, all the lost
Persephones below, each
word a clue to find her

to remember her to life

4

because Eros is all and Eros tells
and all that Eros ever does

speaks out from a dust of scribbled responses
a whole new word that hurts to hear

5

hurts you because you are the intended
the promised one

for you the smoke on the horizon
the dawn flush rose rush
here, I give it to you

6

but I mean it
this new thing

any this

this thing that speaks
from living time

magical formula
anything that speaks

is a branch

broken off heaven

a psalm of desire cum commento

where the scholiast rests his fingers

lightly at the base of your spine.

16 November 2002

BEYOND

But is even that far enough to bring it
the rain back to the sky
sitting upside down above me
her hair stampedes my eyes

and the doctor never comes back to the clinic
he wants to cure a different kind of sickness
one nobody has, a malady
beyond the mind, but he feels it

horizons are the hectic flush of it
so he's gone with the antelope over the prairie
seeking another chemistry
leaving us with the rain my clumsy lover

all everywhere at once and the blue
parrots are still there, one of them
riots through my memory of fact
where names of foreign cities and the Popes are stored

until I don't know who I love anymore
and who the Queen of Hesperus is now
or where I left the screwdriver last night
when I went out to fix something crying in the dark.

17 November 2002

THE INSPECTION

Because when I'm worried
it's always the police
beginning again with rain and a volcano
and men with flashlights move through my garden
investigating the latest failures of my care

so many forgotten perennials
a little thoughtfulness would have saved
but it's all trembling and hiding with me now
and the men shake their heads
and look at me with irritated compassion
knowing full well I don't belong on this earth

but it's not up to them to remove me
they just switch off their torches and leave
and I'm suddenly full of fury at all this judging
going on, my own and other people's
why don't other people leave other people alone
to live out their fantasies and be happy as they can

who needs to know where I went wrong?
it's all wrong, it's all cabbages rotting in frost
it's all a dead azalea will never come crimson again
while I lie between sleep and waking
remembering how I had bitten you once
just hard enough for us both to regret it
how strange it is in the midst of all this inadequacy
we still can actually feel one another.

17 November 2002

BELIEVING

caught in beliefs about rituals
rituals about beliefs ideas
about the real

the wooden
shoe falls off the foot
it's slippery down in there
the organic dark
our forms declare
out there in matter,

a sound does it
scares you out of your socks
a sound you think
you heard before, you,
you smoke too much
your visions are all of you
in power, suddenly great
like one of those paper
Japanese flowers
that swells up to a proper rose like
glory when you drop it in the toilet

o I am amazing also, travesty
of what I set out to be and do
we have to be
the thing we loved
and the poor children who collected
stamps grow up cancelled, neat
in the prison house of description

listen to me, I have a telephone
I have good shoes, first theme
always comes back, you see it
as shapes in the fire
when you visit someone with a fireplace
and you stare all night
but she has seen it all before
remember,

I have a samovar
but no friends, a house full of shadows
you and me together, that's the ticket
but they never said to what show
or what government we'd be elected
just the raw ticket in my hand
with a simple number on it
nothing fancy, no cube roots or prime,
just enough to tell you from another
when there are so many others

it tells me I'm not thinking clearly
it tells me you smoke too much
these days out of control
green government in numbered shadows
build my house of sticks
stick it in, you need the information
I want to sit near you and stare at skin
and what kind of Imax is that
the sky broken over me I drown in light.

18 November 2002

LATE NIGHT, GREEK RESTAURANT, POUGHKEEPSIE

When this music was young
nobody was born

there was a star over the stable
but nobody in it

no child, no mom, no wandering Persians.
Even the ox and ass were absent

treading their mysterious occasions
over Jude's hill, how far

we have come,
the militias of common sense

tramping through the night
burning hayricks and hideaways

where romance shivers
tries to sustain some delicate illusions

still in your arms or asleep
on your shoulder.

When this music was young
the earth was newly laid

bluestone and mica schist and shale
and so simple we were then

stealing and lying and hitting each other
happy children before time began,

that endless sin.

18 November 2002

ATTITUDES

Evidence. Not a word.
Spindrift, what is that.
Hate poetic words.
Money blood desire
war. And alchemy
that lost lewd high school teacher
got so many boys in trouble
before he had to disappear,
vamoose, be occulted.
Where is alchemy now
Nebraska, Winnetka,
breeding parakeets
he teaches to repeat
the litany of matter
what little bits of stuff
we're made of, rounded,
taught us to sweeten
our coffee and touch ourselves
as if the universe were only
a psychological problem
and I still think it is.

19 November 2002

for Franck André Jamme

**IFEV
ERYT
HING
KNEW
MEIC
OULD
LIST
ENLE
SSAN
DDAN
CEMO
REWI
THMY
OWNF
OOTs
TEPS**

19 November 2002

BASIC ENGLISH

Alternative

to reading

nothing

reading nothing

sparrow hawk?

only use

words your mother knew

sumac oatmeal kidney dear

but most of all the names of flowers

flowers that she knew

I'll never know

such names.

Brooklyn 1939. A word on paper comes my way. I was reading books at four but do I even now understand what words mean? My eyes move and something happens in my head. I see a nobleman in prison eating hashish paste. A little light slants in the rock window. I see a young Princetonian swim the Hellespont. Is this what reading's for, Helen at the gate looking down on men already dead and don't know it, the old Trojans behind her whispering like mice as they adore her unconscious haunches? Is that all there is in words, the haunches of a woman, the shadow of a cloud?

19 November 2002

READING

It just now, sixty years later, occurs to me how strange it is that no one took an interest in me in those days. People do get interested in bright children. What a strange curse, that no one did. How I might have blossomed. I might have spoken languages instead of just reading them. I might have made music instead of just listening. What a strange blessing, too, that no one did. How I might have been warped or stifled by advice. I might have learned to read systematically, and spent my life reading without writing. I might have found the teachings of state and church duly transmitted to me satisfying enough to keep me thinly nourished with no further enterprise on my part but smartly listening. I don't know. One way or another it's strange. At five I presented myself at the public library, upstairs, on Nostrand Avenue, smallest branch library I ever saw in New York. I wanted to take out books. The librarians were surprised and suspicious. No sense of wonder at a bright or hungry child. Just doubt. Can he and should he. No respect for what he wanted, which could be, couldn't it, what he needs? Doesn't desire often, not always, reveal need? Anyhow, they didn't. They let me take out a few children's books, to my disappointment, I wasn't a child, I was a reader. In a few weeks they let me take out whatever I wanted. In front of the grocery I found a nice pale wooden orange crate, a two—sectioned affair which, stood on end, became a bookcase in my bedroom when I struggled it home and up the stairs. I was young enough for that little box to take a big effort. My body still remembers the struggle of it up the narrow stairs. My mother was upset at the effort, puzzled at the bookcase. But no one, not parent, teacher, nun or priest thought to guide or counsel or show any interest at all in this otherwise healthy sturdy child that loved to read. It seems so strange now, when we knock ourselves out to signal and reward the slightest signs of talent in a child. Evidently the angels saw to it that I was left strictly on my own. Maybe till there were teachers ready for me, or I was ready to take them with a grain of salt. No wonder I was stubborn and headstrong and arrogant when I finally found myself, in college at 15, among other people who actually read books out of the earnest grail quest for those clues that run from book to book to book almost forever, the old pleasure, the new world found.

19 November 2002

THE FEW THINGS WE CAN BE SURE OF

and the list stops there
a null set, can't think
of a single thing

change, yes,
change, whatever it is
will definitely change
but we can't be sure
of when or how or how much
or who will hurt
and who will benefit

what the trees will look like then
to whom, in another season,
another moon.

20 November 2002

PAGING JUDITH GOLDSTEIN

I lost a girl last night.
Her name is Judith Goldstein,
early twenties, slim, spectacles.
We were having tea in the museum
and she didn't feel very well
I offered to drive her home
and she was happy to accept.
My black car was parked
expensively on 54th street
and we were on our way
by way of a bookshop in the basement
where I lost her,
people always get lost
among the books.
I wandered around a long time
anxiously looking for her
worried because she felt sick
and might by now be sicker.
But I didn't know her well
in fact I don't know why
we were together, only by now
we weren't, she was lost
and I was looking
through shop after shop
of endless dream—mazes
underground bazaars.
I never found her though I found
other people I know and other
women who looked like her

but when I approached them
they would suddenly have
children or the wrong hair.
By now a lot of us were worried
about her and kept looking
but only I knew her name
and finally said it, maybe
we should try to page her
there must be a system somewhere
somebody said, something
that asks other people
where they are so other people
can find them and help them
and go home together or apart,
where are they? Where was she?
Looking for people is so dyslexic
and I don't even know how it came
to pass that not an hour before
we were having a quiet boring
tête-à-tête lifelessly upstairs
before all of this happened.
Or I thought it happened.

21 November 2002

GALEOTTO

Not to let things float too long.

There is a measure
out there in the bay

always a bay where I live
that borderlands my experience
crazy with marsh grass, with weed

but where I first knew water was no rock.
That's important, the water
was stronger than the land, everything
was unsteady, to stand
depends on the democracy of mud
spreading weight over such ground as there is
like slow skating, very slow.
Eventually all things sink into the sea
and the sea wouldn't change,
just come more, always
with the same expression on her face.

I'm telling the truth, it's too early to lie.
I spoke a different language then
that the body slowly loses, a limber
willingness to feel, feel anything at all,

to know at last the other side of skin.
What skin is meant to keep us from.
The lie of language

comes later, a book someone gives you
you're afraid to open
but finally all the bright pictures seduce you
and you read

then that second language, Language, rises in you
and takes over your game board and your fingerprints

because language always knows better than you
language has always been there before you.

Sometimes it's exciting to come to a place
where language has been a long time before
and keeps telling you about,

exciting

to catch up with a word
and find suddenly it's not in your mouth,
it's out there all round you, snow
or even in your hand, amber

and know that this is what language
has been pointing to all along,
strange to think that the word
confers special privilege on its thing itself
by naming it previous to your embrace

when we finally find it
yet it's not just a sleek warm
lump of light in the palm of your hand
it's Baltic Amber, thousands of years.

All language is seduction
a go-between, a sly
intrusion on our original feelings

at the behest of and for
the benefit of the Other
who is always waiting

waiting for me
to open my mouth
and answer her

then I'm trapped
in the saying

an answer is no better than a question,
the seduction
abstracts me from myself
into her web

and I lost my original language
the way a wounded bird loses the sky.

21 November 2002

HOMMAGE A JAMME

OUGHT
NEEDS
NOCOW
ITMIL
KSITS
ELFDR
Y

WHERE
AREHA
VINGB
EENSO
MEWHE
REWEN
O W

ORARE
WOMEN
THEMS
ELVES
THEPR
AYERS
WESAY

RENEW
MASKS
ASSIG
NOLDN
AMEST
ILLSO
MEBOD
YCOME
SHOME

21 November 2002

GRAIL

something that asks
silver polish
pink gritty smooth anointing
a cup somebody
must have drunk from
why else was it made
and who?
Wouldn't you?

21 November 2002

GOING TO THE BATHROOM

A sleight of body:
focus
on the journey not the goal.

As if we all
knew why (how)
anybody goes.

We're not angels
but we do come back.

21 November 2002

LA DANSE

Graces illuminate musculature
I have never seen Elena dance
but I know something from the way
she frowns. The rest of her
somewhere else must be smiling.

21 November 2002